


What is the Overarching Teaching of Scripture?

 The Bible and Homosexuality

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The Grace and Truth Approach

Last week we said that our approach to this topic is one that must keep in careful balance grace and truth. This is the approach of Jesus in John 7 and 8 with the woman caught in adultery. On one hand He said to the accusers, "Which of you is without sin?" and on the other hand He said to the woman, "Go and sin no more?" He neither neglected grace nor compromised truth. We must do the same. To neglect grace is to become hateful and mean-spirited. To compromise truth is to lead others into error. Neither is acceptable to God. We must therefore learn to "speak the truth in love."

The History of Homosexuality

After looking briefly at the history of homosexuality and seeing that it has a long and tolerated history outside of the Judeo-Christian worldview we mentioned that re-defining marriage as between two persons rather than between one man and one woman is blazing new territory. Never has this been done and during the preliminary Supreme Court hearings going back to April of 2015 Justice Kennedy felt that it would be a huge step for this court to re-define the age-old definition of marriage as between one man and one woman. And yet that is what they have done and we will talk about what exactly they have done when we get to Romans 1. But as a consequence, the Church of Jesus Christ has to decide what to do.

Four Things the Church Can Do

I mentioned four things we could possibly do. First, capitulate. This is to abandon what the Bible teaches and adopt what is culturally acceptable. We concluded that this is not an acceptable approach for a Christian with a high view of Scripture and a desire to be faithful. Second, separate. This is to isolate ourselves from the surrounding culture or disengage. We concluded that this is not an acceptable approach for a Christian who follows Jesus' command to go into all the world and make disciples and Jesus' example of eating and drinking

with tax collectors and sinners, with appropriate parameters put in place for those interactions. Jesus' reasoning was that He did not come to save those who already perceived themselves as righteous but to save those who know they were sinners. We might be surprised to see that those whom Christ is calling to Himself are not on our checklist. Often the most hardened criminals are those who respond to the grace of God in Jesus Christ because they have a deeper sense of their lost-ness. Third, accommodate. This is to reevaluate traditional interpretations of the Bible in order to show that they reconcile with what the culture deems acceptable. We concluded that this may be acceptable depending upon what the Bible actually teaches. But I already pointed out that the approach thus far has been unacceptable because it commits the error of reductionism, which is reducing the issue down to seven or eight passages. It denies the sufficiency of Scripture by arguing that no texts of Scripture directly touches or has a bearing on modern, loving, committed same-sex relationships, and it inadequately compares this issue to other historical issues the church has dealt with like geocentrism or slavery, in order to get a foothold in launching the argument for Scriptural affirmation of loving, committed, same sex relationships. Fourth, resonate. This is to speak the truth in such a way that it will resonate with men made in God's image. This way involves both grace and truth. We concluded that this is the most acceptable approach for a Christian because it is reflected in the biblical testimony; it recognizes that men are made in God's image and that God stretches out to men in grace and speaks to them truth. If we can master this way of thinking then we can enjoy the privilege of being brought into the process of seeing God's redeeming grace transform someone else's life. So our approach is to speak in such a way as to resonate.

Keeping in Mind the Audience

As we're trying to resonate with men's souls we said to keep in mind whether the person you are talking to is a believer or an unbeliever. You may not know and so your chief approach is to ask questions. That is the way to discover where a person is on the gospel. I suggested that if the person is an unbeliever then our ultimate aim should be to get to the gospel but our means of getting there is by building a relationship with them and asking questions. You can't learn anything about anybody while you are talking. We also said that the questions need to avoid the surface level of trading political rhetoric and go deep; try to hit the levels of conversation that deal with ethics, what is right and wrong, epistemology, how we know what is right and wrong and ontology, who we are as people and what is the meaning and purpose of life. Everyone is made in God's image and has these deeper questions. God approaches us in Scripture with these very kinds of questions and He knows us best. Whether we can get there in a conversation with a person is a question but one thing we can do is be willing to be vulnerable so that others see that we are human just like they are and that we all face the same basic questions, the same basic issues. Solomon says that God has set eternity in men's hearts. That means that God put in man's heart the sense that there is something more to life than just this realm. Knowing that gives us something to appeal to in our conversation with unbelievers. They are not blank slates. They are primed by God to know Him. I appeal again this week to having compassion for unbelievers because they are not our enemies.

They may be on the other side of the political fence, they may be on the other side of the moral fence but they are by no means our enemies. One of the first rules of winning a war is "Know your enemy." If you are fighting people you are not fighting your enemy. Eph 6:11 tells us that our enemies are not flesh and blood...but the rulers, the powers, the world forces of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness. Satan and the fallen angels are our true enemies and we fight them with spiritual weapons, the armor of God. Eph 2:1-3 teaches us that unbelievers are dead in their trespasses and sins and that they walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Putting the two passages together we see that Satan is our arch-enemy and that he is ruling over and through and in unbelievers so that they do his bidding. Ultimately they are nothing more than pawns in his hand. We should remember this and have compassion on them. It is only the light of the gospel that can pierce the darkness of their hearts (2 Cor 4). And it is our aim to get there through befriending them and asking them the deeper questions. We may not encounter many people that respond positively, we may not lead any to Christ, but this should be our attitude and we should constantly pray for them and for ourselves that we will honor Christ in all that we say and do. As Charlie Clough said, "In the final analysis good results will come about only as we submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He clarifies wisdom principles to us--and as He providentially superintends how our listener is impacted by the exchange."

An Example from an Op-Ed

Let's take an example of how to ask some probing questions from this op-ed piece in the Fredericksburg Standard Radio Post. I don't know the lady that wrote this article but what do I know? I know that she is made in God's image. I know that Christ died for her. That's a good place to start. Let's read it. The title is "Grateful for progressives." The letter reads, "As a local business owner and compassionate humanitarian, I feel it is my responsibility to strengthen our community by sharing my opinion regarding marriage equality....It sickens me to sit quietly and allow all intelligent, open minded, conscientious community members to be ostracized, personally insulted and alienated by the ignorant, religious-based, conservative bigotry acting as the common, majority voice of our community....I am embarrassed by the recent articles and guest columns that perpetuate and attempt to justify discrimination, prejudice and a limited, destructive, narrow and exclusive world view....Sustainable populations of all species rely on diversity. Humans continue to evolve....I am grateful to the progressive thinkers in our government for recognizing that society will only improve by legalizing marriage equality so that dissenting opinions can no longer stand in the way of true love."

We're going to bypass the title for now. Scan the first paragraph. Is there anything wrong there? She's a business owner. Good thing. The Bible supports businesses and owning your own business. No problem. She identifies as a "compassionate humanitarian." Is that good? Sure. Nothing wrong. In fact, it's commendable. Next phrase, "I feel it is my responsibility to strengthen our community." Anything wrong with that? Nothing wrong with strengthening the community. It's great! We could get picky and be incorrigible but it's best to praise paragraph

one. Paragraph two, we can't do everything but if you scan paragraph two what's the overriding emphasis? Judgment. Divisiveness. She's throwing rocks at people because they threw rocks at people. What can we ask? By what standard are you judging? That's an ethical question. Somewhere there's a standard being invoked here. How do you know which side is intelligent and which side is ignorant? That's an epistemological question. One may think it is obvious but it's not at all obvious. One has to give an account for how he knows these things. Third paragraph, what's going on here? More judgment. More divisiveness. But one thing is added. What is it? "I am embarrassed..." What's that a call for? Sympathy. Poor lady. It appeals but it is not a good way to argue. What else might we wonder? She's very much against discriminating but isn't she discriminating? You can't have it only one way. Discrimination is a two way street. We could do more but let's move on. Fourth paragraph, what do we see here? "Sustainable populations." Where is that language coming from? An environmentalist worldview. All we're doing is listening here. Listening because we want to learn something about her worldview. Sustainability is a buzz word for the environmentalist worldview. So have we learned something? Yes. Before we move on, what is a sustainable population? It isn't 6.5 billion by any stretch of the imagination. So who is she calling for the destruction of here? People who are on the other side of the issue. "Sustainable populations of all species rely on diversity." What can we ask here? How does this idea fit with what you said before about people on the other side of the issue? Does "diversity" include people on the other side of the issue or exclude them? If exclude then what do you mean by "diversity." Don't you really just want people to hold to your view? Isn't your view rather narrow-minded? Wouldn't you prefer unity over diversity? But if sustainable populations rely on diversity then isn't that a contradiction? Next statement, "Humans continue to evolve." What can we ask here? If evolution is true then where do right and wrong come from? How do we know what is right and wrong? Can right evolve into wrong? There are a number of questions we could ask here. Fifth paragraph, what do we see here? An important word, "I am grateful to the progressive thinkers..." Here's another buzz word, "progressive." Do we learn anything by that? Yes. Adding it all up we have a pretty good picture of her worldview, she's a progressive environmentalist evolutionist. But let's just take the word "progressive." This word carries with it the idea that we've gotten ahead. But have we gotten ahead? What do you have to know first before you can know if you've gotten ahead? Where you started and where you're going. And now we're talking about the meaning and purpose of life. We could talk about a hundred other things in here, "equality," "marriage equality," the list goes on and on but I just pick it up as an example of how we might start dialoguing with this person. Just ask questions. Some of the questions are more benign and others are trying to punch holes in their argument by just pointing out the inconsistencies or trying to get them to go deeper. It's practical just to sit down with an op-ed like this and practice how you would handle it in a Christ-honoring fashion.

Alright, that's basically how you deal with an unbeliever. Now we come to dealing with believers and here our aim is to find harmony on what the Bible teaches and this requires that we form friendships so we can influence and discuss the text. This is where we have to understand what they are arguing because there are now books, articles and pastors teaching that God and the Bible affirm same-sex relationships that are committed, loving.

What they've done is re-evaluated the text. Most of them reduce the issue down to six or seven passages; Gen 19, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lev 18 and 20, the Abominations, Romans 1, the Exchanging what is Natural for what is Unnatural, and 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1, the Vice Lists. After reducing the issue down to these passages they reevaluate these passages and come to the conclusion expressed here by Matthew Vines, "My larger argument is this: *Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships.*"¹ In other words, there are two things Vines and other affirmers want to hold on to at the same time; on one hand, adherence to the "full authority of Scripture" and on the other hand, affirmation of certain kinds of "same-sex relationships," namely, those that are committed and monogamous. It's my conclusion that these two cannot be held at the same time because the "full authority" of Scripture includes its sufficiency in all matters of faith and practice. Once they have reduced the issue down to six or seven passages and concluded that they don't touch the issue of committed, monogamous same-sex relationships then they have essentially said that the Scriptures are insufficient. Repeatedly authors of this vein state explicitly that the Scriptures do not directly address the types of same-sex relationships that are committed and monogamous. For example, Brownson says, "The moral logic underpinning the negative portrayal of same-sex eroticism in Scripture *does not directly address* committed, loving, consecrated same-sex relationships today."² In that statement he maintains on one hand that there are some forms of same-sex relationships that the Scriptures frown upon, namely "same-sex eroticism," by which he means when the act is driven by lust; but on the other hand, as far as the Scriptures take on "committed, loving, consecrated same-sex relationships," he concludes that the Scriptures are silent. We should be fair to note that Brownson does hold that the Scriptures do *indirectly* address these types of relationships, and affirms them. The way he thinks the Scriptures indirectly affirm these same-sex relationships is by attaching characteristics from the Bible such as love, commitment and consecration to them. However, to think that God did not directly address same-sex relationships is, in my estimation, a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. In fact, the Scriptures have a lot to say about the issue. So this approach has at least two serious problems; 1) the error of reductionism and 2) the implicit denial of the sufficiency of Scripture.

What Do the Scriptures Teach?

When we come to the overarching theme of Scripture on sex and relationships we find a consistent witness from Genesis to Revelation. This overarching argument is often missed because so much attention is focused on six or seven passages. First, throughout all of Scripture there is only one testimony. That testimony is that the design and shape of marriage is between one man and one woman. Not only is this attested to by the unique creation and design of male and female in Genesis 1-2 but consistently throughout the rest of Scripture the original design is held up by example as the norm and standard. The healthy propagation of the human race depends on it. Never once do we read of a committed, loving same-sex relationship. If this silence is thought to affirm it does nothing of the sort as we will clearly show. Occasionally we do read of other arrangements such as concubinage, as with David and Solomon or polygamy, as with Jacob. However, the Scriptures do not affirm them either.

Instead the Scriptures frown upon them by describing the negative consequences of violating the one man/one woman standard. Bitter rivalry between the wives and children are well-attested and only shed further confirmation of Scripture's negative stance toward these violations of the one man/one woman standard. Second, Scripture uses the one man/one woman standard as a basis for the metaphor of Christ and His Church, attributing to Christ the role of the husband who loves, honors, nourishes and cherishes His wife; the Church, and attributing to the Church the role of wife who respects and fears her Husband, Christ. Role distinctions among husband and wife clearly undergird the role distinctions between Christ and His Church. Yet role distinctions are consistently downplayed by Christian authors who affirm committed, loving same-sex relationships. In fact, much ink is spilled on showing historically that what we consider masculine and feminine roles today have not been the views of people in various cultures in the past. However, while this may be true, the views of people in various cultures in the past are not the standard for measuring what masculine and feminine roles should be. The Bible remains our sole authority and standard for determining roles. However, the fact that this is part of the discussion should lead us to re-evaluate what the Bible teaches as far as role distinctions between male and female in order to not overstep Scriptural bounds. Third, biblical role distinctions point to male and female complementing one another. Complementarity teaches that male and female are equal in essence but distinct in role. The basis for complementarity is rooted in the Triune God Himself. The Bible teaches that God is one in essence and three in person; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As far as essence is concerned the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all co-equal. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" referring to the equality of essence He shared with the Father. However, as far as role is concerned the Son submits to the Father. Jesus said, "Not My will be done but Thy will." Therefore, it should be observed that if distinction in role in the Godhead does not imply inferiority of essence then it does not do so in marriage either. However, most Christian authors who affirm committed, loving same-sex relationships reject complementarity and opt for egalitarianism. Egalitarianism maintains that for male and female to be of equal essence they must also be equal in role. Any role distinction between male and female is considered as necessarily entailing inferiority of essence. This is why egalitarians often deny that the Son is of the same essence as the Father. This is a denial of the Trinity. When they observe that the Son submits to the Father they often conclude that this is evidence that the Son is not God.

What we see here then is that the issue of same-sex relationships is not just one issue but is tied to many issues. It's why it's so important to never isolate one doctrine of Scripture from all the other doctrines. Ultimately they all flow together and link and interrelate like a web-work such that if you pull on one side of the web the rest of the web is distorted. This is the way Scripture and doctrine works. There's a web work here that goes all the way back to the Trinity and that's why it's often difficult to untangle the web work once you get into these discussions.

Wrapping up this argument, you need to be able to articulate that the overarching theme of Scripture in the design and structure is always one man and one woman and you need to be able to show that this serves as the

basis for the relationship between Christ and His Church in the present age and that the distinction of roles in the Christ-Church relationship points to distinctions of role in the husband-wife relationship and that finally the equality of essence and distinctions of role in marriage are firmly rooted in the Triune God Himself. Those Christians who affirm committed, loving same-sex relationships must distort or reject these overarching themes of Scripture. Thus, we should be prepared to engage them on such issues as complementarianism and Trinitarianism as they are tied in to this issue if we are to convince them of the error of affirming committed, loving same-sex relationships. In a very real sense then, when we engage them in this way we are calling them back to the historic Christian faith.

¹ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, p 3.

² James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 279.